JOHN JACKSON

The Elusive Snowman

(*Plates 27–33*)

In November 1994 a report came out of China of a sighting that had been made of three large humanoids in a remote region of the Shennongjia National Forest Park in Hubei Province. The original report appears to have been made by a group of ten Chinese tourists, all of them engineers and well educated. They described how, whilst driving down a steep mountain road, they saw at a distance of thirty yards, three figures, tall, hairy and ape-like in appearance. When the engineers approached the creatures, they fled into the dense forest nearby, demonstrating great speed and strength.

Chinese scientists hailed the sighting as a major discovery and subsequently a number of research teams revisited the area collecting samples of hair and faeces, as well as measuring the size of the footprints. It is said that analysis showed the samples to have come from a long-haired, big-footed herbivorous animal. In 1995 a Chinese expedition, including some twenty scientists, revisited the area of the Shennongjia forest, but later reported that nothing new had been discovered.

In 1921 when Colonel Howard-Bury, leader of the Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, along with Mallory and Bullock, found footprints on the Lhakpa La, their porters told them that they were the tracks of the meteh-kangmi. The name 'abominable snowman' came into use when a *Times* journalist, Henry Newman, gave it as the translation of the name meteh-kangmi, as sent back by Colonel Howard-Bury in his account of the expedition's experience on the pass. Meh-teh is the name used in Sola Khumbu, and yeh-teh – yeti – is the mutation of that name. Newman's colourful translation of meteh-kangmi created a lot of interest in the daily press, and this interest was renewed in 1953 following the climbing of Everest.

The Head Lama of Thyangboche Gompa gave the expedition an interesting account of a sighting near the monastery. In addition, Ralph Izzard, a journalist with the *Daily Mail*, who had followed the fortunes of the expedition, had discussed with Tom Stobart, the Everest cine-photographer, the possibility of a search for the 'abominable snowman'. Subsequently the *Daily Mail* launched the expedition of which I was a member.

A Ceremonial Dance and a Symbolic Meh-teh

Early in the expedition, we were invited to a ceremonial dance at Thyangboche Gompa, so armed with photographic equipment and a tape recorder we ascended the track to the monastery. Once inside the courtyard we noted the gompa bell, an oxygen cylinder from one of the pre-war Everest expeditions. Brought across from the north side of the mountain, it now hung suspended from the roof by an open window.

The other walls of the room, those not covered by books or by *thangkas*, were patterned with strange geometrical designs or painted with lively figured frescos. One of these frescos created much interest because it depicted a symbolic meh-teh being chased by men on horseback. The creature's body was painted blue and had a repulsive green face topped by long green hair. A blue and red tongue protruded from its gaping mouth and snakes writhed about its neck and shoulders. None of us had heard of such a painting before but a few days later Kapa Kalden, the lama from Kumjung who had painted the fresco, gave us a less symbolic painting of the meh-teh, as well as the chu-teh and the dzu-teh. From the paintings and by interrogation of the Sherpas, we got a clear impression that the dzu-teh is a bear, probably the Himalayan red bear (*ursos arctus isabellinus*) that can kill the Sherpa yak. The meh-teh was depicted as a smaller animal. The chu-teh was the smallest – seemingly a gibbon-like creature said to live in Tibet. Or is it a langur monkey? We all hoped we might see a meh-teh, but not for long if it was anything like the painting on the gompa wall.

Pangboche and a Scalp

Another monastery we were particularly keen to visit was the one in Upper Pangboche. This was because of an interesting item of news that hit the headlines after the ascent of Everest in 1953. Several team members had visited Pangboche Gompa and seen the yeh-teh scalp. This had already been examined by Charles Evans the previous year, at which time he had managed to extract a few hairs from the crest. On arriving home in Britain, he sent the hairs, along with a few questions, to Scotland Yard. Several days later, so the story goes, he received a solemn reply saying: 'Sorry, we don't know this man at all!'

Our initial setback was to discover that the gompa monks had carefully wrapped the scalp with cloth, then sealed the ties with wax. Not at any price could they reveal the scalp, we were told, but a five rupee note proved sufficient to make them break the seal. A most excellent way of obtaining gompa funds! The same ploy worked until the scalp was stolen, except that the price rose tenfold. The scalp, covered with reddish-brown hair, with blue tinges at the roots and a prominent bristly crest running from front to back, resembled nothing I had ever seen before. Small hair pits were clearly visible in the bare areas and Dr Biswamoy Biswas, the zoologist of our party, examined it closely. He was adamant that there were no signs of stitching or other connections and that the scalp was entire.

27. Eric Shipton's famous photograph of footprints on the Menlung La, taken in 1951. Contrary to newspaper reports suggesting that the prints were part of an elaborate joke, both Tom Bourdillon and Michael Ward

Dr Stonor, our anthropologist, ascertained that the scalp had been in the possession of the monastery for some 250 years, and the one strange statement made was that an original could be seen at the Rongbuk Monastery on the north side of Everest. This statement, plus the thick skin and prominent crest, made Tom Stobart and I wonder if the Pangboche scalp was an artifact, possibly made from the hide of a wild boar. Altogether three such scalps were found at different monasteries in Khumbu – one of them at Kumjung. It was the Pangboche scalp that Sir Edmund Hillary, on payment of a large sum of money, managed to borrow for three months during 1960. In New Zealand, America and Europe many scientists examined the scalp, including Dr Bernard Heuvelmans, the Belgian mammologist, who pronounced that it was made from the skin of a serow – a chamois type goat that inhabits the Himalaya.

Later, two zoologists named Swan and Parkins from Hillary's expedition of 1960 obtained the hide of a serow, stretched it over a wooden pro-forma the shape of the yeti scalps and produced an artifact similar to the scalp we had examined at Pangboche. For many, it might seem that the puzzle of the scalps has been solved, but I always remember the statement about the 'original' being at Rongbuk Gompa, and think it would be best to see that one, if it still exists following the destruction of the gompa by the Chinese. Whatever may be decided, we can be sure that the Sherpa did not make the scalps to fool or misguide, for until 1950 no Europeans or Americans had been to Sola Khumbu and we were the first people to seek the snowman in their country.

Why then do the scalps exist at the monasteries? Though having no religious significance, they have for a long time been used at ceremonial dances (such as the Mani Rimdu) at various times of the year. All that can be ascertained is that those who wear the scalps at the dances represent some animal of significance to these people. The age of the scalps suggests the possibility of the animal, whatever it may be, having become extinct, perhaps within living memory. When one is on the spot and faced with a scalp, as well as having knowledge of the numerous stories and sightings by the people of the Himalaya, anyone would be loath to give a definite opinion either way about the 'snowman'.

Sightings, Sadhus and Superstitions

Charles Stonor, the anthropologist on the Snowman Expedition, met many people in Khumbu who professed to have seen the meh-teh, either walking on two legs, or bounding away on all four. One old man told him of how, when a child, he had been attacked by a meh-teh, and showed Stonor his badly damaged hand. Largely, the descriptions suggested a shy animal seldom seen at close quarters but which could become extremely ferocious when annoyed. One of our Sherpas named Danu (in earlier years named 'Prometheus' Danu by Tilman because of his penchant for making huge fires) told a story of how a close friend (a cousin?) named Lakpa Tsering

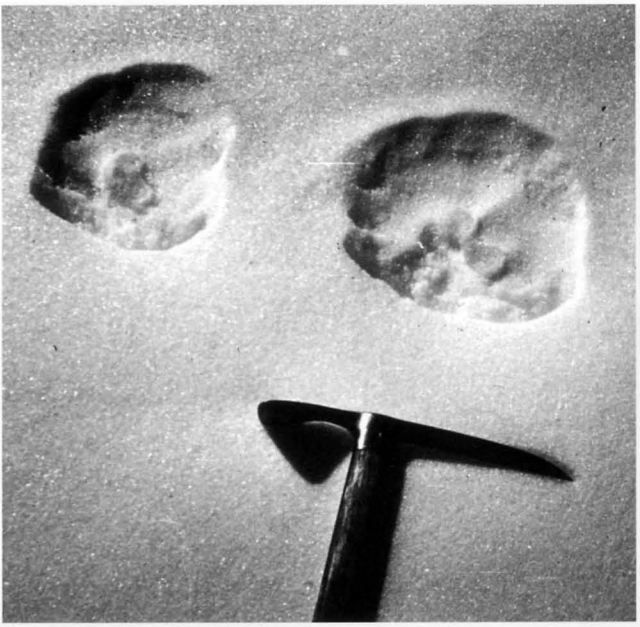
had been attacked by a meh-teh whilst crossing the Nangpa La. In his efforts to escape he had tripped, been severely mauled, and had died of his wounds.

Stories of sightings of the meh-teh are not very common but one of the most famous ocurred in 1925 by N A Tombazi, a member of the Alpine Club. Tombazi was exploring in the area of the Zemu Gap near Kangchenjunga, and in camp one morning he was called out by porters who shouted that a meteh-kangmi was at the side of the glacier. Tombazi described seeing a creature at 300 yards distance, walking upright and stopping occasionally to uproot vegetation among the moraine. The creature showed up dark against the snow and as far as he could make out wore no clothes. He eventually lost sight of it as it moved into the scrub. The footprints he later found at the bushes were similar in shape to those of a man, and some six or seven inches long by four inches wide. Five toe marks were visible and he thought the prints had been made by a biped. My own feelings about this sighting is that he did see a biped, most probably a man – perhaps a fakir or holy man. Such people do frequent remote areas and once in the Barun Valley below Makalu I remember finding a cave at 14,000ft in which a naked Sadhu lived. Tombazi's sighting must have been at a similar altitude for there to have been scrub and rhododendron bushes by the side of the glacier.

Another sighting was made in 1970 by Don Whillans during the Annapurna expedition. At 13,000ft he photographed a trail of prints and from his tent later in the evening watched an animal moving along a ridge. In his description he said that the animal resembled an ape or ape-like creature bounding along on all fours. Examination of the photograph taken by Whillans shows the animal to have been moving in deep snow and my own feelings are that it was a quadruped such as a snow leopard, a Tibetan snow-wolf or more probably a mountain deer.

There was also Tom Stobart's strange experience on the moraine at the base of Pumori and Kala Pattar. Early one morning he sat watching for game beneath a boulder-studded ridge. He let his eyes travel along the ridge, stop for a moment at a reddish-brown boulder and then move on before he brought them back to the same spot. He was surprised to see that the boulder had disappeared and when later he told the story he assured everyone there was no doubt in his mind that he himself had never changed position. Examining the area, he found no prints among the boulders, and on the little evidence he refused to claim that he had seen either a meh-teh or a red bear. Nothing more was seen in that area, and the question of what he saw was never solved.

In his book *The Ascent of Everest* John Hunt tells of a meeting with the Head Lama of Thyangboche. This elderly gentleman told him of a visit by a meh-teh to the gompa grounds. Sometimes it moved on its hind legs and sometimes on all fours, eventually ambling off into the bush after horns and conch shells had been blown to frighten it away. Everest team members had been fascinated by this story but clearly the success of the expedition



28. Footprints photographed during the 1954 Yeti-hunting expedition. (*John Jackson*) (p71)

29. The famous 'Yeti' scalp kept at Pangboche Gompa in 1954. It was later stolen. (*John Jackson*) (p71)

was not affected by the telling of it. I say this because in an interview many years later, John Hunt pointed out that Sherpas are superstitious about the meh-teh and associate a sighting with impending disaster. Pasang Dawa Lama, his personal Sherpa and great friend, told him of the deaths of two people following a sighting. The two were members of a German party in the region of the Zemu Gap near Kangchenjunga in north-east Nepal. With my wife Eileen, I remember similar superstitious feelings being evident following a sighting of some creature. We were guests in Changup's house in Khumjung and he, along with Dawa Tenzing and Lakpa Thondup, were talking with Urkien, Changup's daughter, who had just come down from the village of Langden in the Bhote Kosi. (Urkien now runs the Snowland Hotel at Pheriche, which is on the main track for trekkers going to Everest Base Camp). She was telling them that the people living in Langden were very disturbed and frightened because they had seen a strange creature that could only be a meh-teh. Our hosts obviously thought the same, talked rather furtively in whispers and were very subdued.

More recently, Reinhold Messner told of meeting a meh-teh at a range of twenty yards. The meeting was in 1986 but it certainly didn't end in disaster because towards the end of that year he came by our trek camp in Chukkung on his way to attempt an ascent of Lhotse Shar! Perhaps the most intriguing sighting in recent times was that by Tony Wooldridge. This was in the Garhwal Himalaya in a valley north of Joshimath. After following footprints, he came to an area of unstable snow where recently there had been an avalanche. On the far side of a snow slide was a bush and beside it he tells of seeing a shape that was a dark hairy creature, perhaps two metres in height, and standing erect on two legs. A photograph he took at the time was from quite a long distance and an enlargement does seem to show an anthropoid-type shape. Apparently Wooldridge could also see footprints leading out of the avalanche. It is unfortunate that he was not able to get nearer to the object on the other side of the avalanche, to make a more positive identification of both the object and the footprints.

Two professors pronounced differently on evidence produced by Wooldridge, one favouring the concept that it was most probably a Himalayan langur monkey, but adding a proviso that there was a marginal possibility of it being a large-bodied primate as yet undocumented by zoologists. The second professor, a noted anatomist and anthropologist, concluded that the creature in the photograph was a hominid, allowing the remote possibility that the figure was a sadhu or Hindu holy man caught in the avalanche. I have never seen a langur monkey above 10,000ft, for they live in areas of the bamboo. Nevertheless, this primate is often put forward as being the answer to the riddle of the snowman and if a langur is not suggested, then a sighting is said to be a wandering ascetic.

When we look for other clues it is perhaps the footprints that are of greatest interest. I saw my first ones on the way to the Everest Base Camp. My companions were Biswas, a zoologist, and Stan Jeeves, a photographer.

Early the next morning we ascended to Lobuje yak-hut, which had been the rest camp site for the Swiss and the British Everest teams in 1952 and 1953. Wilfrid Noyce and Alfred Gregory had written to me from this yak-hut the previous year whilst on their way to the icefall, and I looked for evidence of their expedition, finding just one packet of orange crystals in a crack in the wall. Fresh snow had fallen earlier in the day and all around us we found the footprints of fox, Tibetan mouse-hare, snow leopard and the Himalayan snow-cock – a bird about the size of a pheasant. Quickly we erected a Meade Tent, dumped our packs inside the yak-hut and then Stan and I continued to journey up the ablation valley, again finding spoor, this time the prints of mountain deer and of wolf. Near the wolf prints we found other larger prints, some ten inches long and six inches wide. They seemed old, the outline softened by wind and sun. Possibly they had become enlarged because of this, but certainly they were the prints of some large animal and the tracks much larger than any of the others we had seen. We followed them for some eighty yards to the lateral moraine of the Khumbu Glacier where they disappeared among the stones and rubble. Two prints were particularly clear, toe marks were visible and there was a deeper depression at the heel. Later, on return to Lobuje, I wrote in my diary as follows: 'I think certain prints are not of cat, canine or deer family but from knowledge gained of animal life in Kashmir and Ladakh I would say the prints are of a bear or some similar large animal.'

On leaving the icefall to return to Lobuje, we passed by the site of the 1952 Swiss Base Camp at the lake bed of Gorak Shep. Some of the shelter walls they had built for tents were still standing and small clumps of grasses grew between the stones. To our surprise several tiakpa or Tibetan mouse-hares were scuttering between the stones, and we finally caught one.* They are bonny furry creatures about the size of a guinea-pig but perhaps quicker and more dainty in movement. Later we were to find more mouse-hares, some of them at well over 18,000ft, and throughout our stay in Khumbu it was pleasing to discover that an abundance of mammals lived at high altitudes during the Himalayan winter. People often ask me if there is life at such heights, and this is clearly true. At heights varying from 16,000ft to 18,000ft we were aware of fox, mink, weasel, mountain deer, wolf, snow leopard and mountain hare. Large birds such as snow-cock, bar-headed geese and brahminy duck or ruddy shelduck are also seen. The Sherpa takes his yak to graze at heights between 16,000ft and 18,000ft during the monsoon period – a transhumance that is an important part of the Sherpa economy.

At those heights there is a supply of vegetable fodder sufficient for animals even as large as a yak, and carnivores find a sufficiency of food among

* My Sherpa Ang Dawa caught the tiakpa (*Ochotona*) and because it was a new species it was named *Ochotona angdawai* by Dr Biswas, the biologist on the Daily Mail Expedition. Altogether during the Snowman Expedition two new species and two new sub-species of mammal were found.

31. Large prints at 18,500ft on the Nimagawa La in 1954. (*John Jackson*) (p71)

such animals as deer, mountain hares, goat and the tiakpa. Several times we found large lumps of faeces and carefully disintegrated the material. In amongst the matrix were partly digested seeds of grasses, berries and the bones of many small mammals. On one occasion we were able to reconstruct the skeleton of a mouse-hare, concluding that, like the bear, the animal that voided the faeces was an omnivore; but we remembered too that the snowman was always said to be omnivorous.

After we had first been to the icefall and then caught the Tibetan mouse hare at Gorak Shep, we eventually arrived back at Lobuje in the dark. It was very cold but by morning snow was falling heavily. Any hopes of investigating the footprints we had found the previous day were at an end, and yet it is such spoor that have often been a reason for great excitement and a matter for conjecture.

More Footprints and the Riddle Remains

Six of us had just ascended an old glacier moraine in the Chola Khola. My Sherpa, Ang Dawa, was pointing excitedly to the ground and shouting, 'Meh-teh, meh-teh!' We all stepped forward with care to avoid disturbing the large footprints in the snow. They were close together and very large, but they were only close in one particular area. There we found the spoor of snow-cock and realised that the animal making the large prints had been stalking the bird, which must have got away. There were no feathers around and no signs of blood. Carefully we examined the prints and photographed them too. Three toe marks were visible but the rest of the front part of the foot was indistinct. Always there was a deeper depression at one side of the heel than the other – the same side as the toe marks. Measuring them for length and breadth, we found them to be eleven inches by six inches. The snow was crisp and the tracks were crisp too, with no sign of wind change or sun melt round the edges, leading us to the conclusion that they had been made during the previous twenty-four hours. Certainly they were much larger than any bear prints I had ever seen in Kashmir and different in form to the prints of the cantankerous Himalayan black bear we had captured down at base camp near Thyangboche.

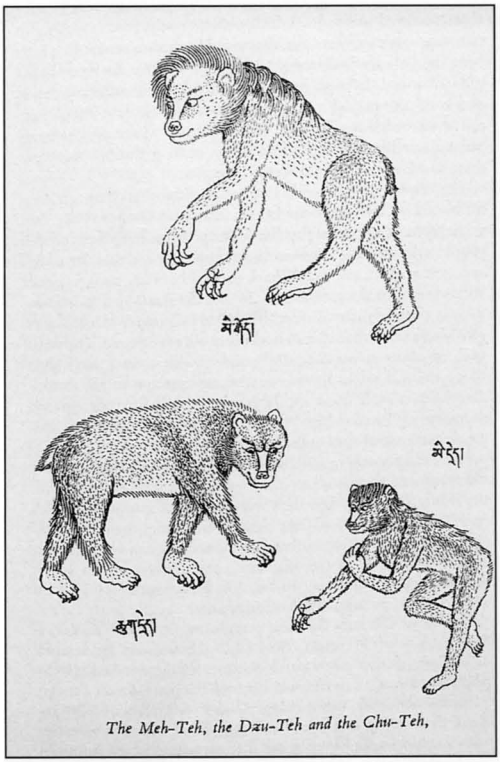
They did remind me of the prints photographed by Eric Shipton and Michael Ward on the Menlung La. The size and the shape were similar and the only thing missing was the big round toe of Shipton's photograph. At the time of our discovery of the footprints in the Chola Khola, other expedition members were following footprints in an adjacent valley – the Upper Dudh Kosi. The journalist Ralph Izzard, along with a big game hunter Gerald Russell, had found tracks and followed them for over two days. Comparing notes later, we realised they were a little smaller than the ones we had seen, nine inches by five inches, and with a stride length of two feet, three inches. They too had the same appearance as those photographed on the Menlung La, with the exception of the round big toe. Izzard and Russell followed the prints up to 17,000ft.

Similar prints were found by Rene Dittert and André Roch in 1952 whilst they were with the Swiss Everest Expedition. Again, the tracks were found at high altitude but were described as having a big toe separated from four other toes. Stride length was two feet, four inches. Photographs of the prints found by the Swiss resemble the photographs of the prints we saw in the Chola Khola and I feel that in each case they were made by the same kind of animal. Dr Wyss Dunant, leader of the Swiss Expedition, thought the prints on the Swiss photographs had been made by a bear or a relation of the bear. Comparing the photographs of the Chola Khola prints with those of Shipton on the Menlung La, I find a large degree of similarity except, in the latter, for the constant enigma of the large and very round big toe. It is as if a Sherpa had inadvertently dropped a prismatic compass, or a coffee container lid, for the toe shape is so perfectly round and the edges are so distinctly sharp. It would be interesting to see more than the one Menlung La print that is shown in all the illustrations, for this might lead to a valuable assessment of the 'big-toe enigma'.

One suggestion that has been made by Professor John Napier in his book *Big Foot* is that the footprints are double; that is, that two tracks of some animal have been superimposed. Professor Lawrence Swan suggested that the double tracks could be that of a Snow Leopard, but Napier, rightly in my opinion, doubts that the relatively small pug marks of the Snow Leopard could be responsible for producing such a large Yeti print. I discussed the question of the snowman prints with Swan in 1987 whilst in California and realised then that he was far from won over by his own suggestion. Having seen and photographed the pugmarks of Snow Leopard myself, I really don't see that they could be responsible for producing the Shipton print.

There is no doubt that many large prints attributed to the snowman have been made in very strange ways. Once, in Kashmir in 1944, Wilfrid Noyce and I followed large prints across a glacier, becoming more and more puzzled as the indentations came closer together. Finally, we saw the solution to the puzzle – a boulder had tumbled down the steep mountain side and bounced across the glacier. The wind and the sun had finalised the shaping, enlarging the marks and softening the edges.

Another set of prints we found in the Chola Valley were made in an odd way. Bill Edgar and I followed a set of prints that had been softened and spread out by melting. Later we found similar but newer tracks, and I took a photograph. It was whilst taking the picture that I realised how they were made. Below the glacier moraine where we found the prints there was a lot of tough grass – nardus. Some animal on the move during a heavy snowfall had, in placing its feet, bent the grass over. This had been quickly buried in the snowfall before its elasticity had time to spring the grass upright again. A trace of the original print was visible and round the print, an area of weakness had been created. As the grass re-erected itself, it had pushed up an oval pattern of snow around the original print. In some places the grass had pushed its way through altogether, the sun melting the snow quickly



The Meh-Teh, the Dzu-Teh and the Chu-Teh,

Two Sherpa representations of the Yeti:

Left

32. Diagrams drawn in 1954 by the lama, Kapa Kalden of Khumjung. (p71)

Below

33. A figurative view of the Yeti, also by Kapa Kalden, painted in the Thyangboche Gompa but destroyed in the fire of 1989. (*John Jackson*) (p71)

and leaving a clear patch of ground around it. The effect of this was to give the appearance of a large toeless creature walking in the snow. This is a variation of the 'elephant effect' described by Eric Shipton, Norman Hardie, and others. Anyone who skis or travels in the mountains will have noticed that on occasions, when the surface of snow is frozen, a much larger section than that of the foot falls inwards leaving a large saucer-like outline. Eventually sun melt and wind effects produce a large hole or 'elephant print'. In his book *In Highest Nepal*, Hardie, who was our Deputy Leader on the 1955 ascent of Kangchenjunga, described such saucer-shaped depressions in the snow. 'Their size was about that of a small elephant but I was not deceived by that aspect, well aware that when new snow falls on a deep footprint, a large circle round it collapses with the melting snow, making a mark far bigger than the original foot.' He concluded that the original prints had been made by a yak.

A number of people have concluded that this collapse of melting snow round an original print of a smaller animal is the answer to the riddle of the snowman tracks. Wolf, snow leopard, deer, goat, langur monkey, yak and other large mammals have all been proposed as the answer at various times. There are many ways in which large prints are made in the snow and I have described a few of them above. I also feel that there are some large prints made by an animal which as yet has not been conclusively identified. Some of these for example are the large track photographs taken by Wyss Dunant near Everest, those taken by Lester Davies in the Kulti Nullah in Lahoul, and the Eric Shipton prints on the Menlung La, as well as those I photographed in the Chola Khola. All are similar in appearance, size and stride length. The differences vary the most in interpretation.

After all of the above, it would seem unfair not to attempt to give some opinion of what I think may be a possible answer to the riddle of the snowman. I have for years suggested the possibility that it is the Tibetan Blue Bear, though with some trepidation, for no less an authority than George Schaller does not even mention the animal in his book *Stones of Silence*. It is, however, mentioned by some writers, and in *The Himalaya*, edited by John Lall, the writer Ramjitsinh has this to say: 'The bear family is represented in the Himalaya by the brown and the Himalayan black bear. A third member, the Tibetan blue bear, is so rare that practically nothing is known about it.' He goes on to say that one was reported across the border in Tibet when he was camping on the Bhutan-Tibetan border in 1965. Though pelts of this animal have been known for 150 years there has never been a Tibetan blue bear in captivity. Pelts were first brought out of Sechuan in northern China early in the last century, and since that time a number of hunters have brought back pelts from the Himalaya, but not the animal.

Why should the answer be the blue bear? Sherpas and other people of the Himalaya are very observant of their environment and its natural history. This became clear to me after the ascent of Kangchenjunga when Sirdar Dawa Tenzing, and Sherpa Changup came to Britain with us. At that time

I was teaching in Redcar and they were both impressed by the sea and sandy shore. Shellfish, crabs, sea-anemones, jellyfish and a host of sea birds caught their interest. Each time, I had to give them the name of each creature, which Dawa then wrote down in Sanskrit in his little book. Similarly, observations were made when they joined me with a school party in the Lake District. Because of their knowledge and keen observation of flora and fauna in the Himalayan environment, I feel that it must be a very rare animal indeed, and perhaps of unusual colouring, to which the Sherpa give the name 'meteh kangmi' or 'meh-teh' – a frightening or startling animal of the snow.

The dzu-teh or red bear is sufficiently well known to them to be ruled out, and any suggestion that the meh-teh is a langur monkey is received with incredulity by the Sherpa. It seems to me that the blue bear (*ursos arctos pruinosus*) is rare enough, and unusual enough in colouring, to startle and surprise any inhabitant of the Himalaya seeing one for the first time. In a similar sort of way, the white rhinoceros had a frightening or startling impact on the inhabitants of Central Africa, and eventually the white rhino took on a religious significance in their minds. Is there any special reason that the symbolic meh-teh of Thyangboche Gompa is painted blue? Is this another possible clue that the answer is a Blue Bear? Or is the colour just a product of Kapa Kalden's mind? Certainly there are still many questions to be answered and one of the strangest is the odd fact that on the old maps the mountains of the Everest, Nuptse, Lhotse and Makalu massif are named the Mahalangur Himal – the mountains of the big apes!

A last thought. There are two passes at the head of the Chola Khola and one of them, the Nimagawa La,* is where on the Yeti Expedition we set up a climbing camp to ascend Kang Cho Shar. During our first evening at the pass I left my companions in their tents and sat down to enjoy the last moments of dusk. Sharp cracks and musical creaks emanated from the glacier to be followed by infinite stillness and silence. The Nimagawa and the huge valley of the Dudh Kosi was but a dim and hazy rift between me and the mountains on the far side. Somewhere there, I thought, there must be many different animals on the move – hunting and hiding. Some of them might be the creatures that left large footprints in the Chola Khola, and I found no difficulty imagining them in that rugged environment, seeking food and shelter. If they were, I felt sorry for them, for this could be their last retreat and, as with the cave bears of Europe during the ice age, the last phase of their existence. Quietly I stood up to return to the tents, and as if in agreement with my thoughts, there came a soft sigh on the wind out of the silence.

* This is also variously named Chola South, Chugima La or simply Chola La.